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My Ship

OR,

ONE DAY BY THE SEA.

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OR

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BY

ELIZABETH D. CLARK.

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THE SEA IS MIGHTY; BUT A MIGHTIER SWAYS HIS REST-
LESS BILLOWS.

—W. C. Bryant.

I.

In the early morn, I stood on the shore,
Gazing over a calm, blue sea.
Hope, so fair and radiant, hovered o'er
And pointed out to me,
In the faraway, the sails of a ship;
The snow-white sails of a stately ship,
"Steering," said Hope, "for thee."
"Ay, truly," I cried, "for me;
And my life will be joy, without, within,
When, ere long, my beautiful ship shall come in.

II.

For no later, I ween, than the bright noontide,
Will the proud vessel near the strand;
And into my haven majestic glide,
And her rich cargo land.
Culture and wealth and a noble name,—
Hope called it a loved, an honored name—
"All this for me, for me,
Is sailing across the sea.
Oh, there's nothing my longing heart would win,
That shall not be mine, when my ship has come in."

III.

Happy morn was that, when Hope and I,
Close together, beside the sea,
Saw the waters reflecting a cloudless sky;
And bright wavelets merrily
Dancing, now in, now out; and afar,
My ship coming, coming, though still afar.
Sunlit and soft the air,
O Memory, linger there;
And those moments of bliss let me live again,
When, entranced, I first looked for a ship to come in.

IV.

But anon, there came, breaking the rapturous spell,
Tiny boats to my feet drifting near,
So slight, that even the wavelets' swell
Seemed more than they could bear.
And weak voices wailed, "Our journey is long;
Our barks are so frail and our journey so long,
Will you not give us aid?
O, strengthen our boats," they said;
And their plea found response my heart within,
And I wrought, while Hope sang of the ship to
come in.

V.

And the work sped well, for Pity and Love
In my heart, gave skill to my hands;
And "Full soon," quoth I, "you will onward move,
Wee crafts, my bolts and bands
Giving strength for a voyage across the sea."—
Ah, little knew I of the changeful sea.—
"Safely you'll glide along,
To the tune of a cheerful song,
And while gaily you skim o'er the placid deep,
I will fashion a pier for my wonderful ship."

VI.

One by one they sailed, my haven was clear;
Hope joyously sang; and I
Planned a base for a firm, a matchless pier:
Then clouds swept o'er the sky;
And the face of the waters soon lost its calm;
The sea grew restless, till now so calm.
Waves in the wavelets' track,
My little boats forcéd back,
With many another, till clamor and din
Filled the place where my beautiful ship
should come in.

VII.

And the boats brought tasks for my hands and brain,
Some were heavy, some, Love made light;
To my heart came Care, but still Hopes' refrain
Rose, ever clear and bright.
Nor was hushed, till the waves of the high noontide
Dashed moaning in,—that so longed for tide,—
And, with their last inleap,
Had landed—no white-sailed ship—
But a darksome spectre that came to my side,
And that said, "I am Sorrow, with thee to abide."

VIII.

Oh that Presence dread! It clouded my brain;
And compassionless, crushed my heart:
And I saw, through tears of woe and pain,
My bright-winged Hope depart.
And in frenzy, I cried to the surging sea,
"One more fierce billow, Death laden,—O Sea,
Hither cast, I implore,
O'erwhelming this darkened shore;
And thus ending the life that without, within,
Is made torture and gloom, by this shade thou'st
brought in."

IX.

But now from the boats that tossed at my feet,
Uprose voices in piteous tone;
And they said, "O, who will thy work complete?
Would'st leave it all undone?"
And still, as before, some appealed to my love:—
For sorrow, tho' merciless, crushed not love.—
Sweet Pity, some bespoke,
Stern Duty, would more invoke;
And I bent to my tasks on the dreary shore,
And oft sighed for my ship, but looked for it,
no more.

X.

On and on I toiled; and if ever a gleam
From the sun, shimmered o'er the sea,
The shadow about me would closer seem;
The sun shone not for me.
And the darkness deepened, till, looking up,—
O souls in woe, look not down, but up,—
Wond'ring, I spied a rift
In the heaviest cloud; and swift
From it floated an angel, pure and white
To my bleeding heart; and lo, there was light.

XI.

And the turbid sea, the clouds o'erhead,
Neath its influence changed their hue;
And a glint reached even my spectre dread,
Its form less darksome grew.
This pure spirit, light bestowing, was—Hope;
A new, a high, a heaven-sent Hope,
Chanting in sweetest strain.
I bent to my work again,
Renewed strength in my hands, while heart within,
There was healing Peace, which with Hope had come in.

XII.

Now the gloaming; and still on the shore,
With my little boats am I seen;
For though some have gone, yet always more
The breakers have washed in.
To its end, slow draws the day that has been
My working time; and its "might have been"
Burdens my tired soul:
Regrets in the dusk waves roll;
And bewildered, I ask—"By mistake, or sin,
Or the will of God, came my grand ship not in?"

XIII.

But a rhythm I note in the sunset chime,
Hope's melody; Rest it brings:
"Light is promised at evening time,"
This the song Hope sings.
"Look for it, child of a day nigh spent,
To the star that burns in the Orient.
Thy burden gather, of wants denied,
Of sins, mistakes and fears,
And lay it before the Crucified;
Thy sorrows all, and tears.
Finish thy lowly work on the shore,
Mourning the vanished hours no more;
Then peacefully lay thee down to sleep,
And the Lord Himself thy soul will keep.
To-morrow shalt thou a new day begin,
Where life will be joy, without, within,
For all that thou cravest, is sure to come in."

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